

**KATIE COATS, VISIT RIDGELAND DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND PR,
EARNS MASTERY LEVEL OF
EXCELLENCE IN TOURISM LEADERSHIP CERTIFICATE**

RIDGELAND, MS (October 18, 2023) – The Ridgeland Tourism Commission (Visit Ridgeland), dedicated to promoting and enhancing the tourism experience in Ridgeland, Mississippi, is excited to announce that Katie Coats, director of marketing and public relations, has achieved the Excellence in Tourism Leadership Program Mastery Level Certificate.

The Excellence in Tourism Leadership Program (mastery level) is a prestigious two-year program organized in collaboration with the Mississippi Tourism Association (MTA) and the Mississippi State University Extension Service's Center for Government and Community Development. The program provides advanced training and development opportunities for professionals in the tourism industry, equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary for effective leadership, advocacy, and public policy administration.

To earn the Mastery Level Certificate, participants are required to complete all coursework and projects, including a comprehensive capstone project that showcases their deep understanding of the program's content and their ability to apply it to their work.

Coats' capstone project aimed to enhance accessibility information on the Visit Ridgeland website, www.visitridgeland.com, to highlight lodging, restaurant, and attraction recommendations and resources in Ridgeland that can accommodate visitors with physical and mental disabilities. The page will launch soon and was inspired by courses from the Excellence in Tourism Leadership Program, such as Community Development and Diversity and Inclusion, as well as insights gained from sessions at the 2022 Governor's Conference on Tourism and various tourism industry educational conferences.

In order to create the new section of the website, Coats researched accessibility initiatives of other destinations, sought to include solutions for not only physical disabilities but also the diverse needs of travelers, collected recommendations from locals to ensure a community-based approach, and wrote content that included information from experts to reflect relevant accessibility content.

In addition to the web page, the project also contributed to improving accessibility in Ridgeland by making the Ridgeland Visitors Center and Visitor Services ADA-compliant, ensuring that everyone can enjoy their experience in Ridgeland.

Coats expressed her gratitude by saying, "I would like to thank MTA and MSU for creating this opportunity, and I'm excited to have been a part of the inaugural class. The sessions were great, and one of the class's most beneficial aspects was collaboration and discussion with my fellow participants and Mississippi tourism professionals."

"We are incredibly proud of Katie for her outstanding achievement in completing the Excellence in Tourism Leadership Program at the Mastery Level," stated Visit Ridgeland President and CEO Chris Chapman. "Her dedication to promoting accessibility in Ridgeland and her commitment to professional development are truly inspiring. This project is a testament to her dedication to ensuring that Ridgeland remains an inclusive and welcoming destination for all travelers."

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About Visit Ridgeland: Visit Ridgeland is the destination marketing organization created to be the voice of tourism driving the economic growth of leisure and business travel, special events, competitive sports, and meetings while providing support for the Ridgeland Tourism industry and its brand story.